

THE COMPANION.

No. IV.—WEDNESDAY, JAN. 30, 1828.

“Something alone yet not alone, to be wished, and only to be found, in a friend.”—SIR WILLIAM TEMPLE.

FINE DAYS IN JANUARY AND FEBRUARY.

WE speak of those days, unexpected, sunshiny, cheerful, even vernal, which come towards the end of January, and are too apt to come alone. They are often set in the midst of a series of rainy ones, like a patch of blue in the sky. Fine weather is much at any time, after or before the end of the year; but, in the latter case, the days are still winter days; whereas, in the former, the year being turned, and March and April before us, we seem to feel the coming of spring. In the streets and squares, the ladies are abroad, with their colours and glowing cheeks. If you can hear anything but noise, you hear the sparrows. People anticipate at breakfast the pleasure they shall have in “getting out.” The solitary poplar in a corner looks green against the sky; and the brick wall has a warmth in it. Then in the noisier streets, what a multitude and a new life! What horseback! What promenading! What shopping, and giving good day! Bonnets encounter bonnets:—all the Miss Williamses meet all the Miss Joneses; and everybody wonders, particularly at nothing. The shop windows, putting forward their best, may be said to be in blossom. The yellow carriages flash in the sunshine; footmen rejoice in their white calves, not dabbed upon, as usual, with rain; the gossips look out of their three pair-of-stairs windows; other windows are thrown open; fruiterers' shops look well, swelling with full baskets; pavements are found to be dry; lap-dogs frisk under their asthmas; and old gentlemen issue forth, peering up at the region of the north-east.

Then in the country, how emerald the green, how open-looking the prospect! Honeysuckles (a name alone with a garden in it) are detected in blossom; the hazel follows; the snowdrop hangs its white perfection, exquisite with green; we fancy the trees are already thicker; voices of winter birds are taken for new ones; and, in February new ones come—the thrush, the chaffinch, and the wood-lark. Then rooks begin to pair; and the wagtail dances in the lane. As we write this article, the sun is on our paper, and chanticleer (the same, we trust, that we heard the other day) seems to crow in a very different style, lord of the ascendant, and as willing to be with his wives abroad as at home. We think we see him, as in Chaucer's homestead:

He looketh, as it were a grim leoun;
And on his toes he roameth up and down;
Him deigneth not to set his foot to ground;
He clucketh when he hath a corn yfound,
And to him runnen then his wivès all.

Will the reader have the rest of the picture, as Chaucer gave it? It is as bright and strong as the day itself, and as suited to it as a falcon to a knight's fist. Hear how the old poet throws forth his strenuous music; as fine, considered as mere music and versification, as the description is pleasant and noble.

His comb was redder than the fine corall,
Embattled, as it were a castle wall.
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone;
Like azure were his leggès and his tone;
His nailès, whiter than the lilly flower,
And like the burnèd gold was his colour.

Hardly one pause like the other throughout, and yet all win; and sweet. The pause on the third syllable in the last line but one, and that on the sixth in the last, together with the deep variety of vowels, make a beautiful concluding couplet; and indeed the whole is a study for versification. So little were those old poets unaware of their task, as some are apt to suppose them: and so little have others dreamt, that they surpassed them in their own pretensions. The accent, it is to be observed, in those concluding words, as *coral* and *colour*, is to be thrown on the last syllable, as it is in Italian. *Colòr*, *colòre*, and Chaucer's old Anglo-Gallican word, is a much nobler one than our modern *colour*. We have injured many such words by throwing back the accent.

We should beg pardon for this digression, if it had not been part of our understood agreement with the reader to be as desultory as we please, and as befits Companions. Our very enjoyment

of the day we are describing would not let us do otherwise. It is also an old fancy of ours to associate the ideas of Chaucer with that of any early and vigorous manifestation of light and pleasure. He is not only the "morning-star" of our poetry, as Denham called him, but the morning itself, and a good bit of the noon; and we could as soon help quoting him at the beginning of the year, as we could help wishing to hear the cry of primroses, and thinking of the sweet faces that buy them.

NEW TRAGEDY OF THE SERF.

Little need be said of the new tragedy at Covent Garden, called the *Serf*. It turns upon the love of two brothers (a prince and a natural son) for the same lady. The lady's affection is for the latter. The prince, maddened with jealousy, forgets the regard he has had for a loving brother, and takes advantage of his illegitimate birth to inflict on him a series of degradations, the most prominent of which is putting him into livery, and making him wait at table on himself and his mistress. The brother, maddened in his turn, aims his sword at the tyrant, and is about to be condemned to death, when his pardon is procured by the self-sacrifice of the lady, who agrees to marry the prince provided her lover obtains his freedom. The compromise brings torture, instead of relief, to the poor lover; and the end is, that he fights with and is mutually slain with the prince, the lady arriving only in time to be clasped in his dying arms. It must not be forgotten that all this misery is brought about by another serf, a sort of Iago, who, because his wife had been forcibly taken from him by his feudal lord, the father of the two young men, is resolved to undermine their house, and be the death of as many aristocrats as possible.

There is "capability" in this plot; and one of the characters, the lady, is touchingly conceived; a right woman, who, with equal sense and sweetness, endeavours to make peace between the brothers; and failing, is driven upon one of those pieces of self-sacrifice, which it is so much more flattering to one sex to expect from them, than for the other to exact. In this, however, as in every other respect, the execution of the piece is a mere commonplace. The opinions are old; the language is old; the very liberalisms are old, lagging in, as it were, after the age has got beyond it, and halting us to read a superfluous moral. The tragedy is attributed to a young nobleman, author of some fashion-

able novels, from one of which the plot is said to be taken. We know not how this may be; but the incident of the livery, upon which so much stress is laid, looks a little as if it came out of a sphere of life where such things are of consequence. It may be in keeping with the time of the piece; but people cannot enter now-a-days into the excessive degradation of wearing a particular sort of coat; nor very well pitch their imaginations back into those ages of lords and footmen. It is not that they would care nothing for the coat, but that they have far got beyond the question; and cannot, in the present state of their knowledge, and their tranquil scorn of those old abuses, sympathize properly with the frenzy produced by its infliction. They think the man ought to despise it. Tragedy should turn as little as possible upon those *fashions* of a passion, and identify itself with what is lasting. The other livery-man, the new Iago, is less mixed up with the symbol of his servitude; but then it was a dangerous thing to give us an Iago not clever,—a devil without any pepper of wit. And the man too, to account for his freedom of speech, and to remind us the worse of Shakspeare in the insipidity of it, is made a “jester.” He is Yorick and Iago in one, and has not a word to say for himself. “Be still my heart”—“Distraction’s in the thought”—“You cannot surely be serious, Madam?” these are the sort of phrases above which the dialogue seldom rises. The only good-looking things, the two or three plums of comfort, stuck in this very daily bread, were picked out by the newspapers, and are not new enough to repeat. The piece was given out when we saw it (the second night) with much more applause than objection; but we hold it impossible to have a run. The circles may help it to a promenade.

We would rather say nothing of the actors. Perhaps it would not be fair upon them in a piece like this. We must not forget, however, to mention our gratitude for the very capital selection of music, which is played at this theatre between the acts. Not having yet been at Drury Lane, we know not whether it is the same there. But here the lovers of Haydn and Mozart recognise with delight the most beautiful passages of those authors; not a hasty beginning or so, hacked into indifference, and interrupted by the rising of the curtain, before the best passages are arrived at; but the passages themselves, selected with the greatest taste, and recalling the happiest of one’s musical evenings. On the night in question, for instance, there were some of the loveliest bits out of Haydn’s symphonies, and the divine *andante* movement in Mozart’s symphony in E flat.

ITALIAN OPERA.—TANCREDI.—RE-APPEARANCE OF
MADAME PASTA.

GOING to the King's Theatre again, is a very different thing from renewing one's acquaintance with the other theatres. We confess, with all our love of Italian and of singing, we do not like it so well. The quiet seems pleasanter at first; treading upon matting is a sort of polite and gingerly thing; and it is interesting to look around for those beautiful faces belonging to Lady Charlottes and Carolines, dropping their lids down upon us as if they wore coronets, and not always the better for it. But the cue of polite life is to take indifference for self-possession; and you are not seated long before you begin to feel that there is an air of neutralization and falsehood around you. The quiet is a dread of committing themselves;—people come as much to be seen as to see;—the performers in the boxes prepare for disputing attention with those on the stage;—men lounge about the allies, looking so very easy, that they are evidently full of constraint; the looks of the women dispute one another's pretensions;—if you have been long away, you are not sure that something is not amiss in your appearance, that you are not guilty of some overt-act of a wrong cape, or absurd reasonableness of neckcloth; in short, you feel that the great majority of the persons around you have come to the Opera because it is the Opera, and not from any real love of music and the graces. The only persons really interested, with the exception of a few private lovers of music here and there, are the young and inexperienced; musicians, who come to criticise the music; and foreigners, whom it is pleasant to hear speaking their own language. After all, these last are the only persons who seem at home. The musicians are apt to be thinking too much of their flats and sharps, and compasses of voice. The young people, though they dare not own it to themselves, soon get heartily tired of everything but looking at the company; and the private lover of music gets as tired with the glare and common-place of nine-tenths of the performance.

Thanks and glory to PASTA, who relieved us from all this spectacle of indifference and pretension, the moment we heard the soul in her voice, and beheld the sincerity in her face. Pit and boxes were at once forgotten, quality, affectation, criticism, everything but delight and nature. Like a lark, she took us up at once out of that "sullen earth," and made us feel ourselves in a heaven of warmth and truth, and thrilling sensibility. If these are thought enthusiastic phrases, they are so. What others could we use to do

justice to the enthusiasm of genius, and to the delight it produces in those golden showers out of its sky?

We saw Madame Pasta, for the first time, years ago, in the character of the Page in *Figaro*, and afterwards, in that of the female (we forget her name) in the *Clemenza di Tito*, who sings with her lover the beautiful duet, *Deh prendi un dolce amplesso*. In the page, if we recollect, we thought her heavy and ungain. In the other part, we remember that Begrez, a singer not given to too much passion, stood while he was singing the duet with her, holding her hand, not indifferently as they generally do, but with tenderness and affection, cherishing it against his bosom; a piece of nature, which we have since attributed to her suggestion. If we are wrong, we beg his pardon. At all events, it was creditable to him, suggested or not.

Since we have seen Madame Pasta again, the heavy kind of simplicity which we recollect in her *Figaro*, must either have been the consequence of her having a greater tact for nature and truth, than she at that time felt experience enough to put forth; or her performance of the part may have been better suited to the character than we took it for. The Page, in that very breath-suspended and conscious piece, which is always hovering on the borders of strange things, is in reality in a very awkward position, and extremely sensible of it; and we are not sure, if we could have seen Madame Pasta in it, with as much knowledge of her then, as we persuade ourselves we have now, that we should not have found her the exact person for the character, and presenting a portrait, full of truth, in its very ungainness and want of teaching.

Truth is the great charm of this fine vocal actress. She waits upon it, without claim or misgiving; and like a noble mistress, truth in turn waits upon her, and loves her like her child. We never saw anybody before on the stage who impressed us with a sense of this sort of moral charm in its perfection. Even Mrs Siddons had always a queen-like air in her nature, which seemed to be conscious of the homage paid it, and to crown itself with its glory. Madame Pasta, as the occasion demands, is tranquil, grave, smiling, transported, angry, affectionate, voluptuous; intent at one minute as a bust, radiant as a child with joy at the next; intellectual as a Muse, full of wily and sliding tones as a Venus; in short, the occasion itself, and whatever it does with the human being. Imagine a female brought up in solitude, with a natural sincerity that nothing has injured, walking quietly about a beautiful spot, reading everything that comes in her way, accomplished, at ease, getting even a little too fat with the perfection of her comfort and her ignorance of anything ungraceful; and imagine this same female gifted with as much sensibility as truth, and weeping, laugh-

ing, and undergoing every emotion that books can furnish her with, as she turns over the leaves; and you have a picture of this noble performer, and the extraordinary effect she produces without anything like theatrical effort. Not that she cannot indulge the critics now and then with the idea of a stage-actress, and set herself to make her *bravura* effective; but truth is at the bottom even of that, and she is sure to throw in some tone, and sweet reference to nature; as much as to say to the lovers of it, "Do not imagine I have forgotten you." She is like a nature full of truth, brought out of solitude into the world;—and too much habituated to sincerity, too sweet in the use of it, and too conscious of the power it gives her, to forego so rare, so charming, and so triumphant a distinction.

We do not pretend to make any discovery in this matter. The accounts we heard of her in *Medea* shewed us that the discovery had been made already; and it has been set forth by a critic, worthy of that name, in an article comparing this "perfection of natural acting" with that of the French. With a reference to this article, which is to be found in the *Plain Speaker*, vol. 2, and which we regret we have no room to quote, for nothing need be said of the opera itself, we must conclude. *Tancredi* is said to be one of the most popular of Rossini's operas, but is by no means one of his best; being crammed, in fact, as full of common-places and old threadbare recitative, as nine-tenths of it can hold. It is theatrical clothesman's music. But there is good in the remainder; and the fine air, *Di tanti palpiti*, is part of it. If any one thinks he has heard this air a hundred times, till he has got tired of it, let him never mind, but go and hear it from Madame Pasta; he will then find he has never heard it before. We have left ourselves as little room to speak of the other performers, some of them excellent in their way, especially Madame Caradori; but after our new, true, and most original acquaintance, even the best of conventional singers become comparatively uninteresting. Caradori is like a sweet and perfect musical instrument, by the side of her; not that she does not act too better than most singers; she even contrives, in her manners, to give us an amiable as well as clever idea of her; but Pasta, coming upon all this, even in her most tranquil moments, seems like the very noon-tide of humanity risen upon a cold morning of it. There is more effective grace in the least of her movements, though she is too fat, and sometimes looks heavily so, than in all the received elegancies of the stage;—so beautiful as well as great is truth. By the way, we had forgotten to say that her voice is not perfect. Who asks whether any voice is so, when sensibility and sincerity speak together, and the sound is hugged into one's heart!

SIZE AND PRICE OF THE COMPANION.

THE major part of our Correspondents this time will find answers on the wrapper which accompanies this number; but having been shorter in it than we supposed, we begin with them here.

Medium and a *Well-wisher* (both of them very agreeably and sincerely, which is hitting the two points most worthy of each other) object to the small size of the *Companion*, considering the price. We have had the same objection from several private quarters, and acknowledge that it is well-founded. When we hear of other persons, who object to our price without saying a word of our merits, we, of course, feel all the indifference of wounded authorship; but we like those who tell us, as these our friends do, that they are sorry they come to the end of their reading so soon. The former put us upon the hard task of comparing our little work with those heaps of compilation and common-place with which the economical faculties of the public have been so long beguiled into heavy dinners; that is to say, a tart, or a cheesecake, compared with the majesty of a peck of dough: which is unfair. Our other admonishers we love and agree with, and could find it in our hearts to give them as many *Companions* as they chose for nothing. The truth is, our minds misgave us on this point, when we set up the paper; but by universal agreement, we had given the public a former paper, the *Indicator*, at a price below what it ought to have been; we recollected under what circumstances of trouble and ill-health we wrote those closely-filled pages, and how little we gained by them; and, in our new publication we allowed ourselves to go to something of the other extreme, till we could see what our head would bear, as well as our pocket. We did not desire to write so little; on the contrary, we have found the space insufficient for what we had to say; and we no sooner found also that we could write thus much more with impunity, than we resolved upon making some addition. It is now in contemplation to double the size of the *Companion*; but we cannot say at what addition of pence. At all events, we trust we shall do our best to make it worth the enormity. It was not desirable to begin in this manner at once, because diminution would have had an ill look; but addition is another matter; and we are happy in being able to state, that our facts are in accordance with appearances, and that we make the addition not in consequence of failure, but of success.

Since writing the article on the *Serf*, the piece has died. We shall be more cautious in future how we make haste to criticise new plays, as we had much rather have to state why things succeed, than why they fail. It has been denied in the papers, that the author is the nobleman alluded to. A lady of quality has been mentioned, of whom surely it is unworthy. Rank, it would seem, has had something to do with it. But these are not points with which we mean to busy ourselves.

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